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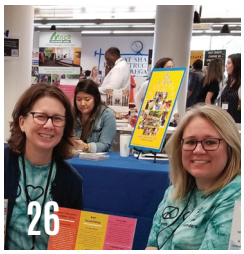

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Leslie Vincent releases her debut jazz album after years of performing on the stage.
Cover photo by Steve Diamond

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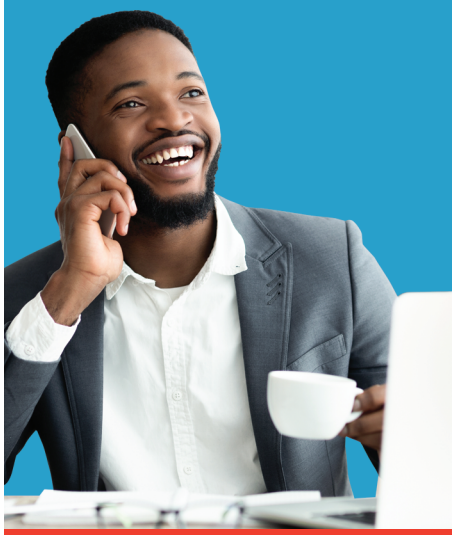

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QUORUM SECTION

FROM THE EDITOR | BY RYAN PATCHIN

2020: PRIDE IS STILL ALIVE

I was at the Mall of America on Tuesday March 17, doing a quick, drop-in style mission, with the hopes of securing a new pair of pants.

The world changed while I was in the dressing room.

Maybe it was the pants, they are pretty great. I bought them; tremendous deal. What I walked into that day was a mostly-empty mall, which only had plans to shut down the indoor theme park for two-weeks, beginning the following day.

In mid-March we knew about the virus—COVID-19 was the buzzword atop everyone's mind, we just had no idea what it had in store for us. By the time I left, the mall had plans to close in its entirety for two weeks, effective immediately. And that was just the tip of the Orewellian-shaped iceberg.

To be clear, I fully support cooperating with the guidelines set fourth by people smarter than myself. Preservation of life is paramount; we can make some relatively minor adjustments to our lives in hopes of saving others'. As we're learning, guidelines are a dynamic tool, and they've put all sorts of pressure on all sorts of people—and proven our ability to adapt.

There was an unsettling scramble as I was leaving the mall on that day of decision. Merchants mounted a hasty attempt to lockdown their valuables and fortify their storefronts for a two-week standstill. After slamming down their security gates, mall vendors would join the uni-directional flow of humans evacuating the shopping behemoth, taking whatever property they could carry.

It sounded insane at the time: A two-week lockdown. People being asked (*told*) to stay home. Paychecks coming to a halt, in many cases. Masks, sanitizer, new buzz-phrases, like *social distancing and flatten the curve* —the virus was spreading in so many ways.

I am writing this on July 23, 2020, the day after Minnesota Governor Tim Walz announced a statewide mask mandate, covering public and indoor spaces. A full four months after the mall announced a two-week closure, we're deep into a restrictive, but generally accepted life. The mall has reopened, but the indoor theme park hasn't heard a shriek or seen a soda spill since mid-March. Restaurants have reopened to a new but adequate version of dining out, while professional sports have seen their seasons virtually decimated. Concerts, festivals, and our beloved PRIDE—gone.

Alive is the human-spirit. Our aforementioned adaptability has

shined bright in the past few months, as we created "2020 versions" of our normal lives. Whether it's visiting a loved one through a window, transforming your home into an office or school, attending a Zoom wedding—we've all shared in the experience of living this amended life. As evidenced in this issue, *Lavender* readers found safe and enjoyable ways to get together and share PRIDE with those they love. The photos we've featured are just a sample of the reader submissions, with many other memories made during this PRIDE.

This is a year to learn. *From home.* I'm not saying that we all should stay inside and read all day, (but you should) but I am saying we can learn a lot about ourselves in times like these. For someone like myself, I learned that a lot of my of life already resembles quarantine guidelines. I'm ready to rock. I also learned that online shopping isn't so bad, but it's more important than ever to support the local brick-and-mortars that matter to you. Learn a new craft. Get your bike tuned-up by your local shop and then RIDE the thing—totally legal. Riding the city streets at the speed of *bicycle* is a great way to see your hometown. You can see the bricks of community and breathe-in fresher air than we've seen in decades. It's close to being together.

PRIDE, the week, has come and gone. Loring Park didn't roar to life for the weekend of festivities and Hennepin Avenue didn't close for a parade route. But PRIDE still happened. People got together virtually, distanced, or otherwise, and made what they could of it. I have no doubt that this year will stand out in everyone's minds, clearer than years past, given the disruptive nature of *virus-life.* People will remember their makeshift PRIDE celebrations, and they'll have such individualized experiences to share. We at *Lavender* are grateful to have photo evidence of people doing what they have to in order to come together. Even when it's apart.

In a time when we can't gather, it's still encouraging to see dispersed PRIDE. ▮

OUR LAVENDER

A WORD IN EDGEWISE | BY E.B. BOATNER

THE FIRST STEP TOWARD KNOWLEDGE

As the Black Plague ravaged Europe in 1346, no one understood why they'd been afflicted. The 14th century folk of every station were ignorant, having no way to know the cause of their widespread destruction which was later estimated to have consumed some 50,000,000 souls–60 percent of Europe's population.

Up to the 19th century, cholera outbreaks were considered to be caused by miasma, particles floating through the air to infect its victims. In 1854 (during the cholera pandemic of 1848-1860) an outbreak in London around Broad Street, Soho, killed 616 people. Dr. John Snow's studies and mapping of the area led to the discovery that cholera was caused by germ-infected water drawn, in this case, from a specific pump. They were ignorant then, but Dr. Snow led the way to knowledge. The bacterium was named Vibrio cholera, and we now know it is spread through the ingestion of contaminated food or water.

Ignorance can be a way-station along the journey, offering an opportunity to gain knowledge, or to remain in ignorance. At its least freighted, "ignorance" simply means lacking knowledge or understanding of the thing in question, without the judgmental marker of "stupid." The Danish mystic Max Heindal said, "The man who realizes his ignorance has taken the first step toward knowledge."

Which brings us to today. We are in the midst of a world-wide pandemic. The medical professions have made huge strides over the centuries; our equipment allows us to see beyond Antonie van Leeuwenhoek's "very little animalcules" he first glimpsed in 1764 through a lens he'd ground himself. The self-taught Dutch scientist went from ignorance to the limited–though amazing–knowledge of single-celled life. Viruses were not yet known, though their existence has haunted mankind to the present day through smallpox, measles, Ebola, and now, SARS-CoV-2.

We are still ignorant of much concerning COVID-19, though we may make the analogy that viral plague requirements are similar to those that fire needs to consume a forest. First, suitable hosts, existing close together in sufficient numbers (a city, a forest) to allow the virus to spread readily, and assure replacements for dead or consumed hosts. Plague in a small village before modern travel would decimate the inhabitants, then burn itself out. Today's world offers plenty of viral fuel. Us.

To repeat: Very simple measures are available as firebreaks for our COVID-19 conflagration. This virus is thought to spread from person to person through respiratory droplets in exhalations; singing, shouting, sneezing, coughing and so on. Again: Keep at least six feet from other people; Wear a mask out shopping or with others to protect them; Self-isolate as much as possible when not necessary to leave home.

COVID-19 will be with us until it burns through us, taking unknown numbers with it; until it burns out, if hosts are not available (isolated); or a vaccine is discovered. We are ignorant but can learn. "Being ignorant is not so much a shame," warned Benjamin Franklin, "as being unwilling to learn." ▮

LAVENDER LENS | PHOTOS BY SOPHIA HANTZES

DYKES ON BIKES TWIN CITIES PRIDE ASHLEY RUKES VIRTUAL PRIDE PARADE

JUNE 14, 2020

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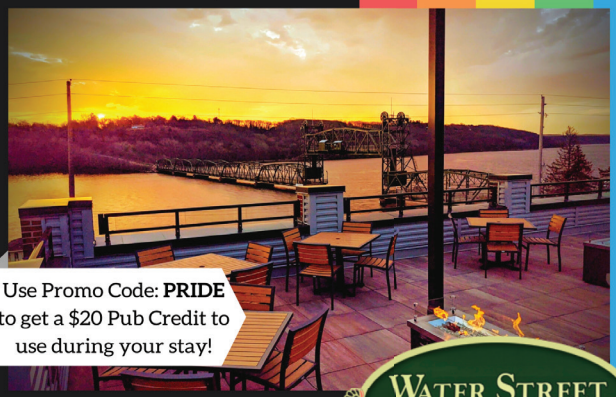

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LAVENDER's PRIDE @ HOME PARTIES

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BROADWAY ON DEMAND

With the news last month that Broadway would officially be closed the remainder of 2020, the question is will other large theatres follow suit? Many touring shows from the Ordway and Hennepin Theatre Trust have announced rescheduled dates which means we are still, unfortunately, streaming theatre from home. Thankfully there are a ton of new choices for us to watch from the comfort of our homes so we can continue to social distance.

HAMILTON: AN AMERICAN MUSICAL

Disney+

The news has been on the horizon since last year that Disney had obtained the exclusive streaming rights to the musical Hamilton. What was originally supposed to air in 2021, had moved up to be released this year at the beginning of July. The professionally recorded film includes the original cast including creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, Phillipa Soo, Leslie Odom, Jr., Daveed Diggs and Renee Elise Goldberry.

I've been privileged enough to see it when the touring cast came to Minneapolis a few years ago but I'm pretty excited to see the original cast. There's a reason why this show won 11 Tony awards, eight Drama Desk awards and a Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

FUNNY GIRL

Broadway HD

I've talked about this streaming service before because it's truly the closest many of us will get to Broadway shows. The streaming service will now be the home of London's West End revival of Funny Girl. Originally starring Barbra Streisand, this one stars Sheridan Smith as the lovable and hilarious Fanny Brice. Funny Girl is a semi-biographical plot that is based on Brice, a film actress and comedian and features songs including I'm the Greatest Star and Doesn't Rain on my Parade.

If you haven't seen this before I highly suggest watching it as well as the movie. It's a musical that truly doesn't get revived often by local theatre companies so whenever I get a chance to see it, I try my best to.

SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE

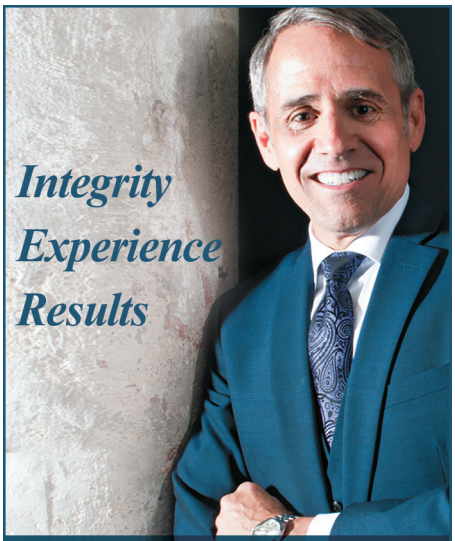
Broadway HD

Another fantastic addition to Broadway HD is Sunday in the Park with George. This Stephen Sondheim musical is a classic that is inspired by the French painter George Seurat and his painting A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte. To be able to witness the original cast of Bernadette Peters and Mandy Patinkin sing the intricate lyrics that Sondheim has written is truly a decadent treat.

THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL: LIVE ON STAGE

Amazon Prime

In December of 2019, a filmed version of the musical aired on Nickelodeon and reunited members of the original cast. Alright, I know what you're thinking, SpongeBob? Really, Brett? I know. I thought so too. However the SpongeBob Musical is actually pretty darn cute. Seeing the original cast and show on Broadway was one of the most fun experiences I've had at the theatre. The music, written by a variety of A-list stars including David Bowie, Panic! At the Disco, Cyndi Lauper and Sara Bareilles, is very catchy. All I can say is give it a chance! ▮



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A NEW GOLDEN ERA

Instant, mood-setting music—the sounds that used to hold together a social gathering, or sell out the dining room of the local jazz club... well, it's back.

As a girl, Leslie Vincent lived the bounce-around life of an army brat. Growing up, she moved around the East Coast of the U.S., and she spent time in the United Kingdom. Leslie saw her first stage performance in the West End and she was hooked—Leslie begged her parents to put her in any voice, dance, and acting class she could find.

Leslie cut her teeth on the stage, performing with Artistry, History Theatre, Old Log Theatre, Park Square Theatre, Theatre Elision, Sidekick Theatre, and Umbrella Collective. Musically, she's played Crooners Dunsmore Room, Dakota Jazz Club, the Turf Club, and is a regular at St. Joan of Arc's yearly cabaret. Leslie is half of the jazz duo, The Champagne Drops, and she writes her own, intelligently-humored music.

2020 saw the release of Leslie's debut album. These Foolish Things delivers lively, band-backed tracks with Leslie's golden-era voice stealing the show. Leslie was kind enough to sit down and talk her music and her album release:

You have a lot of experience performing live—how does that differ from recording an album?

There's a learning curve. When you're on stage, you learn to let things go; you make a mistake, you let it go…and recording is a lot of monotony and a lot of listening to yourself and saying, OK, what if I did this? I was very anal about the whole process. You know, I wanted everything to be exactly how I wanted it to be. I would do maybe 10 takes, then sit and listen.

What is the recording process?

Continued on page 20

We would [record] in sections. With jazz, you usually have one time through the song, instrumental, back to the bridge or b-section, to the end of the song. We would record the first section of singing, feel how we wanted it and moved through the song. We laid down the band first, so we made what are called scratch vocals where I sang with the band, basically making my own karaoke tracks…

Where did you record the album

We were at IPR, the Institute of Production and Recording.

Have you been able to perform this album live at all (with COVID-19 restrictions)

No, I haven't… August 10th, I'll be performing it live for the first time.

Where?

Krooner's. They're doing these drive-in shows where you drive up and you can sit outside of your car and listen. It's super cute.

Who is this album for?

My future children. I want them to know I was cool before I was their mom, and I've been reflecting a lot about legacy. I think, as you get older, legacy becomes more important.

… The original reason I started this project was because people asked for it. [People] would ask, 'do you have an album?' After a while I thought: 'this is sort of dumb that I don't have an album; I should have some kind of recording.' I wanted some sort of record of like, hey, we made this version of the song. You can't find this version of this song, but we made it, you know…

I did this; I made this. Hopefully, my kids listen.

You host a Monday night live show (Facebook, 7 p.m.), any plans you can share?

I do have plans… it's a really tricky situation (streaming music). None of these platforms are set up to stream music… It just doesn't work.

I have a dream. A really good friend of mine who comes to all my shows—I call him my heckler because he always heckles me; it's really cute. He's a big TV buff and I want to do a show that's all TV theme songs. And then he would talk about the shows, but I think he'd have to come over. So I'm like, is there a way we can safely do that? …I think it could be cute.

I see you're planning a wedding…

We were supposed to get married this Saturday—that was our O.G. wedding date. We decided to push it out for a year because my fiancée is a schoolteacher and so the summer is really the time we want to get married so we can have a nice honeymoon and celebrate. We were super lucky to just make a decision back in March, so all of our vendors came with us. You know, it'll be really the same wedding, just a year out. We wanted to celebrate with our friends and family. ∎

Leslie performs at the Surf Ballroom. Photo by Steve Diamond

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COMMUNITY | BY HOLLY PETERSON | PHOTOS COURTESY OF NASIR ABDI-OMAR

QUEER SOMALIS

One of the most quintessential parts of being queer, unfortunately, is feeling like we do not fit in. Although our government, schools, places of worship, and society in general are slowly making progress towards equality, the sad truth is that most of us can point to at least one time when we swallowed some aspect of our identity in an attempt to fit in. Queer communities often offer space where we can be our authentic selves, but it is not uncommon to experience gatekeeping in queer circles as well.

Nasir Abdi-Omar, a queer Somali-American who lives in Minneapolis, has experienced this catch-22 first-hand. "I've had to deal with ignorance on both sides," he explains, "Being a queer Somali person in the Twin Cities sometimes can be alienating…I'm too western for Somalis and too eastern for white, gay America." Abdi-Omar's Somali heritage is just as much a part of him as his queer identity, which is just as much a part of him as his Americanness. Compromising any of these identities for the sake of the others is not a sacrifice that he can make while remaining true to himself.

"I love so many things about Somali culture." Abdi-Omar says, "[T]he sense of community, food, and the witty banter," he pauses, "The disconnect with my heritage came to me at an older age." That disconnect was directly related to coming out. "The notion of queerness isn't necessarily accepted in Somali culture," he explains. Despite that, "there are plenty of openly gay Somalis in the Twin Cities [and] more that are uncomfortable coming out."

Abdi-Omar personally has found community through networking groups like Quorum, and is quick to say that he enjoys places like the Saloon and the Eagle. However, it took a while to find a place where he could fully express his queerness alongside his Somali heritage.

Enter Queer Somalis, or QS, an online group created in late 2018, by a Somali-American known simply as Del. "Del didn't feel like we had a platform as queer Somalis to build community," Abdi-Omar says, so Del took initiative and began building that space himself, with Abdi-Omar at his side as a co-founder. "It's a digital platform used for queer Somalis globally to connect, build community, exchange ideas, showcase art, and assist with emergency funding if someone is in a dangerous situation," Abdi-Omar explains.

"For privacy reasons you have to be added by someone already in the group," Del explains, which means that every member of QS has joined through a friend or family member. "I think I added less than 10 folks to the group initially," Del says. Needless to say, the group has snowballed since then, quickly increasing in both size and scope.

QS's mission to keep members safe and their information secure is part of why QS has spread so effectively. Having a safe space to explore the intersection of queer and Somali identities is invaluable to people not only in the local Minnesota queer scene, but around the globe. "Since QS launched, we have had Somali LGBTQIA+ members from all over the world join," says Abdi-Omar.

Connecting with peers who understand the niche experience of being both Somali and queer is as validating as it is empowering, which is the other key contributing factor to the success QS has experienced and why it was created in the first place. "Reaching out to the community and people who understood exactly what I experienced was so beneficial to me. I wanted to find that support in one place, for myself and others," Del says.

On top of being a community uniquely suited to provide a forum for shared experiences and emotional support, QS provides its members with access to information and assistance that can be difficult to come by on an individual basis. "We have shared resources, articles, videos, personal testimonials, and more to support one another," Del explains, "During the pandemic, we started zoom chats and started to connect faces with names."

These Zoom meetings have inspired Abdi-Omar and Del to consider what the next chapter for QS will look like. "We are in the works of transforming [QS] from a platform to an organization," says Abdi-Omar. Del adds, "We've discussed doing an in-person conference… when the pandemic is over I think that can become a reality for us."

Clearly, QS has a bright future. The group began as an invaluable online resource and it is turning into an organization that will connect its members in the real world as well. Most importantly, QS continues to give its members space to be authentically themselves. As we all know, personal authenticity is not always easy, but finding communities that give us the tools to understand ourselves and live every facet of our personal truth sure helps.

"People will say what they want, but at the end of the day I choose to be myself," Abdi-Omar says, "and that is and will always be a Queer Somali American." ▮

LEATHER LIFE | BY STEVE LENIUS

BIPOC Leatherfolk, Part 2

Interview with members of Twin Cities Spectrum, Part 2

This issue's Leather Life column continues the discussion started last issue with members of Twin Cities Spectrum, "a club by people of color across the age, ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity spectrum, interested in leather and kink."

Two other clubs were mentioned during this conversation. They are Twin Cities Sirens, "an inclusive leather club for trans women and trans-feminine individuals," and Twin Cities T-Rexx, "a leather club for trans masculine identified people."

(Interview has been edited and condensed.)

Do you feel welcome and included at community events? What could the community do to be more welcoming and inclusive?

Roxanne Anderson: I'm kind of like laughing and shaking my head because this is, you know, one of the reasons why there is Sirens and T-Rexx and Spectrum. Historically, because of racism, misogyny, sexism, white supremacy—sometimes those spaces in the larger community, be it leather or just the larger queer community, don't feel super-welcoming to us.

Whiskey: I think if the community as a

Image courtesy of Twin Cities Spectrum

whole was interested, they would show up to meetings and events that were held by the smaller clubs. It speaks for itself, I think.

Ivan Nunez: I think the gay community at large needs to really make the effort, to Whiskey's point, to consciously get out of their comfort zone and reach out to people. It's going to require us to open our circles to others that are different than us. It's not only that we as people of color may not feel welcome in some spaces and events, it's that our community at large is not very welcoming to people. I think that we have a great opportunity here to make it better not only for people of color but for everyone.

At least for me, thriving means we participate equally and extensively as clubs, as titleholders, as organizers for events, as making a difference in our community—that we are seen, that our voices are heard and valued.

Danielle Nevels: And keep in mind when we bring up issues like this, we're not saying the community is bad and will always be bad. We want it to change. We want to be a part of this community. That's why we bring up things like this.

IN: We also have to keep in mind how much of a pioneer the Minnesota leather community has been. Look at how most of our leather contests have been diversified and how the rules have changed to make them accessible to a broad demographic in our community. These things are so, so unique for leather in general around the country. T-Rexx and Sirens are the only clubs of their type in the nation. There are other clubs around the country for people of color, but focused on our transgender community, not many. So we are doing great things here.

What do you want other members of the leather/BDSM/fetish community to know about you as individuals and Twin Cities Spectrum as a club?

Ashley Scott: We are dressed like you. There's no difference—we act just like any other club. Give us a chance, come meet the members, pledge if you want to and, you know, come support us.

How do you all feel about voting? We have elections coming up. Is it worth voting, or do you feel it's not going to make any difference?

W: Excuse my language, but fucking vote. My life depends on it. So many other people's lives depend on it. You gotta vote.

AS: Yeah, you gotta vote, even if you have just given up on everything and think, I'm not gonna vote because it's not going to change anything. That's why things aren't changing—because you're not helping people make the change. You definitely need to vote so that you can be heard.

DN: I would say vote, but don't let that be the end.

Anna Meyer: Voting is one piece of what everybody should be doing. We have a system that's in place that impacts our lives daily, and those of our communities. It's important that we make the system that's here the best it can be.

I'm going to add that folks should get counted for the census. It's really important for folks to vote and also to participate in the census and not leave us undercounted or underrepresented anywhere.

RA: Vote, fill out your census and get to know your elected officials. The democratic process is one that we can access more than when it's time to vote. Make sure that your elected officials know how you stand. It's important. That's how they make their decisions.

IN: Yeah, 100 percent vote, and vote every single time. Vote for your club leadership, your neighborhood organization, your school board, vote for everything. Change happens in your immediate local community, so it's not just voting in the national elections. It is voting in the things that sometimes affect us the most.

Final thoughts?

AS: When this [the killing of George Floyd and subsequent protests] happened I was sitting in my living room with my dog, tears streaming down my face, because I had noticed I had stopped walking my dog in fear of things going on. Because of where I live, and me being a black man, I have to be scared walking at a certain time because of the color of my skin. Other people cannot grasp that concept, but the fact that they can't grasp that concept means that there's something wrong. ▮

ONE BIG COLORFUL FAMILY

Rainbow Families has been hosting conferences for the LGBTQ+ family community for sixteen years, and not even COVID-19 can stop their pride.

Attendees gather for a town hall meeting.
Photo by Darren Vance

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Image courtesy of Darren Vance

Family is everything. Whether it comes in the form of supportive parents, siblings, extended relatives, neighbors, or new friends, family is an essential part of the LGBTQ+ community. Through the annual Rainbow Families conferences, the LGBTQ+ family community is able to gather information, collaborate, and make connections with existing families, prospective parents, and allies alike. This year's conference, which will take place virtually on August 8 and 9, will look a bit different than past years but will still offer the same crucial information, resources, and connections.

"In 2004, Rainbow Families held our first 'Family Conference & Gathering,' offering workshops for LGBTQ+ parents. The goal was to provide information on legal roadblocks, pathways to parenthood, to identify safe/friendly schools and medical providers for our children, and more," says Darren Vance, Rainbow Families executive director. "It was a joint effort with Washington D.C.'s Whitman Walker Clinic, and to the best of our knowledge, it was the first of its kind in the United States. Over the years, this grew in size and reputation, including opportunities to connect with LGBTQ+ businesses and service providers, a robust kids camp, and more."

Sixteen years after the conferences first began, Vance says the need for them has remained unchanged.

"Our conference provides vital information on legal issues, race and culture, family building, educating and raising our families, celebrating our queer children, and being engaged allies. This aligns with the Rainbow Families mission; for thirty years, we have offered education courses, support groups, empowerment, and events for the community," Vance says.

Each year, Rainbow Families works to provide timely, relevant programming, especially during its annual conference. This year, they are offering important new workshops including discussions on anti-racist advocacy, teaching kids to become good allies, to have a positive body image, find the best college culture for your teen, and—back by demand—the "Finding Intimacy After Parenthood" course.

"Of course, we have a few of our favorites each year, such as an introduction to adoption, assisted reproductive technology A to Z, parentage laws, and more," Vance says. "This year, we are proud to honor Ellen Kahn, not only as a speaker but as a recipient of our second annual Hero of the Year award. Ellen was one of the founders of Rainbow Families and has dedicated her career to advancing LGBTQ+ families. She is one of those unsung heroes,

Continued on page 28

Rainbow Families resource fair. This year's events have been moved online. Photo by Darren Vance

doing tireless work in the background for our community nationwide."

Another of this year's speakers will be Mondaire Jones, a Black, gay activist, nonprofit leader, and attorney who has recently entered the political world. He will deliver messages of perseverance and hope. Race and diversity expert Beth Wheeler will also offer a powerful presentation on implicit bias, white privilege, and white identity.

"We'll also be hearing from Minnesota Representative Angie Craig, who is a lesbian, married, and a mom," Vance says.

With this year's conference being interrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, Vance says they have had to come up with an entirely new plan for the community event.

"Our 2020 conference had been scheduled for May, which naturally had to be postponed. For a moment, we considered canceling outright this year, but the community spoke up and told us that they very much wanted our conference this year," Vance says. "We had a choice—retreat and hope things get better, or pivot… adjust… I feel we made the best choice for Rainbow Families and for our community."

To protect community members and ensure safety for everyone who wants to participate in this year's Rainbow Families conference, this year's conference will be virtual, but the empowerment and education will be just as strong and vital as previous years.

"Certainly, we value personal connections. We need them. Especially because we're not always welcome, much less celebrated in our everyday lives. Being realistic, however, a virtual conference offers convenience for attendees, allows people to join from anywhere in the country," he says. "While there are several unknowns still, I envision this virtual format will continue as a national program, and we'll work to offer our in-person events, groups, and networking opportunities in local communities."

Due to the online nature of this year's conference, the registration fee is significantly less than ever before, at a more than 50% discount. One registration fee includes one log-on, but you could have more than one person viewing from your screen, laptop or phone. No need to register or pay for two people.

If you miss a workshop on Saturday, or would just like to rewatch one, you can play the recording of any workshop for no additional charge all day Sunday. For more information or to register for the Rainbow Families conference, visit rainbowfamiliesconference.org. ▮

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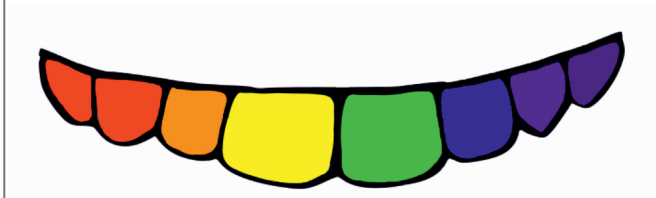

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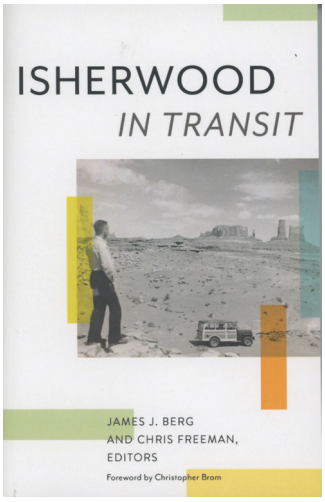
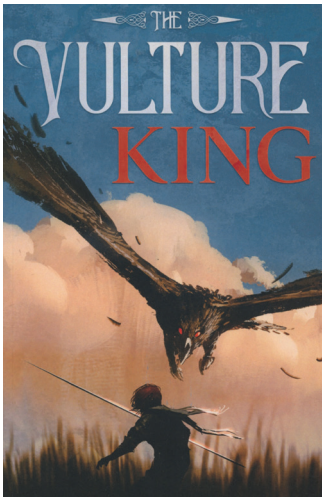


ISHERWOOD IN TRANSIT

Ed. James J. Berg and Chris Freeman
University of Minnesota Press
$27

This book follows up Berg and Freeman's 2015 The American Isherwood. There, they assessed him as an American writer (achieving citizenship in 1946); here, contributors explore the decades Isherwood spent wandering, geographically and spiritually. The seventeen essays resulted from a conference after the opening of Isherwood's vast archive at The Huntington, and approach Isherwood in light of his peripatetic days and his continuing spiritual, Vedantic explorations of the spirit. Xenobe Purvis's "A Faith of Personal Sincerity" and Wendy Moffat's "The Archival "I"" both examine Isherwood's friendship with E.M. Forster, one examining debt to individualism, the other focusing on the "future of queer biography." Other participants include Barrie Jean Borich, Robert L. Caserio, Calvin W. Keogh, and Edmund White. Be sure to read Christopher Bram's excellent foreword.



THE VULTURE KING

Nikki Turner Blkdog Publishing
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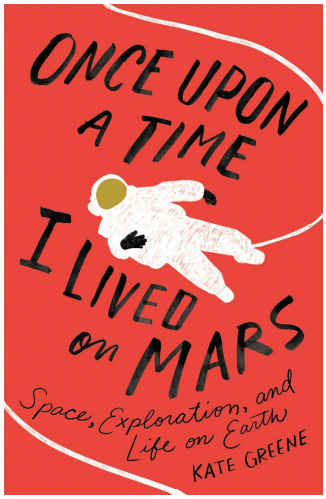
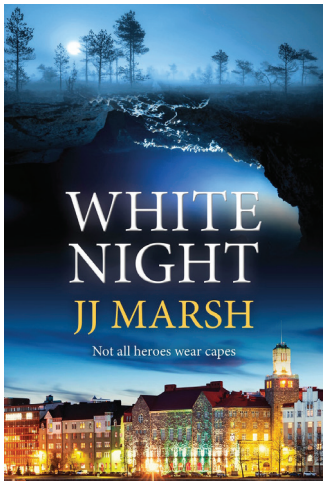
An exciting YA read; as intrepid young protagonists seek liberation from and vengeance upon the all-powerful Vulture King. Orphaned Aram is a blind, outcast Veldera, seeing through his sharp-eyed companion magpie; blindness the price of magic power, his radix. Hired and sheltered by a village farmer, Bayre, Aram uses his power to rescue a mute Velderan girl. Bayre helps them escape to a hidden band of Veldera resistors. Aram, Bina, communicating through her dove, and Tai, a foundling raised by Bayre, set out across the Barrens. Aram learns his mother is alive, the Vulture King's captive. Circumstance dictates Aram is the only hope for all the peoples. Will Aram's untested powers suffice? Bravery, betrayal, selflessness, uses of disability collide. A thoughtful read for parlous times.



ONCE UPON A TIME I LIVED ON MARS

Kate Greene
St. Martin's Press
$27.99

In 2013, Green went to live on Mars. Well, as close as she could get then: NASA's Mars analogue, HI-SEAS, perched high up in a dome on Hawai'i's Mauna Loa volcano. At 8,000 feet above sea level, Green and five fellow "astronauts" spent four isolated months trying out aspects of the "What do they do once they get out onto the ground?" question. To assess the Martian quotidian, they tested anti-microbial clothing, evaluated food systems, charted sleep patterns and psychological stressors astronauts will encounter throughout their projected 2-year voyage. The eleven essays here showcase Green's talents as a laser physicist, essayist and teaching fellow in the writing department at Columbia University.



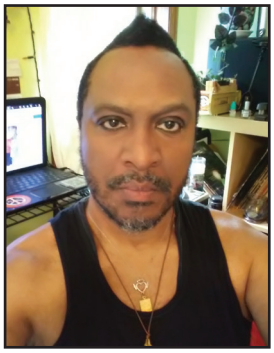
WHITE NIGHT

J.J. Marsh
Prewett Bielmann
$12.99

With the keen mind of a retired Scotland Yard detective, Beatrice Stubbs should find wedding planning a piece of cake. Not so. An emergency in Finland offers reprieve; Berenice and assistant Theo are off, amid promises of swift return. Two teenage anti- nuclear protestors have disappeared. Perpetrated by a polluting industrialist, or a Gaia Warrior PR stunt? But industry brass hired Beatrice, while the boy's parents claim his life depends on daily meds. Leaked information ruins Beatrice's police creds, time is passing, a storm is rising off the coast, and frantic calls are coming in from home. Brit Nordic Noir. Marsh holds the tension, ratchets up the game, interleaving anguish with flashes of humor. The denouement leaves one breathless, assuring Theo a berth in Number 11. ▮

JAMEZ SITINGS | BY JAMEZ L. SMITH

GENESIS



We're all in pain

We all hurt so much

Some of us, centuries longer than others

Some of us, millennia

Some

have learned to laugh about it

Others have learned to lash

Harm is never intended

Until it is.

Hurts either way.

The worst thing I could imagine

Was to cause him pain

To hurt him

To make him cry

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My memory

As strong as I am sensitive

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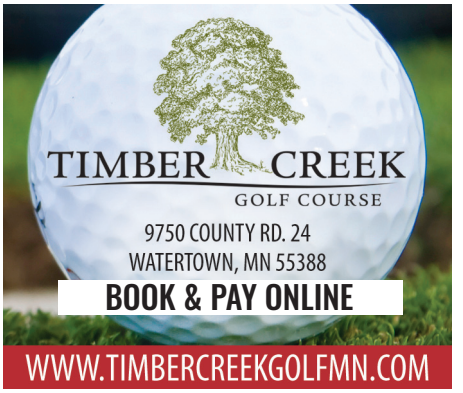

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OUR VOICES

SKIRTING THE ISSUES | BY ELLEN KRUG

THE FATE OF THE REPUBLIC

On my 2020 calendar is a date: November 3. It's been circled since way back in mid-2019, when the calendar had nothing but blank spaces. It's a day for me, a transgender woman, and for the trans community at large, that will determine whether we're erased from society's view entirely.

I know, that sounds awfully end-of-worldly to some reading this. Here she goes again…

As if I really needed a reminder about the importance of our next presidential election, the nudge came in the form of a newsflash about the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services removing healthcare protections for transgender people. I saw the news late on the afternoon of June 12; I was alone and fatigued from a week of Zoom meetings.

As I read that doctors, nurses, therapists, and anyone else associated with healthcare is now free to discriminate against trans people, and that health insurers might be free to exclude us from coverage too, I was immediately thrown into despondency. That's truly the only word for it: Despondent.

It was so bad that I did something that I never do—I reached out to someone for support. Thank god my dear friend Vanessa, another transwoman, picked up. It was that urgent. She talked me off a ledge, literally.

For sure, I've experienced my share of healthcare marginalization—after thirty years of continuous healthcare coverage while I presented as a male, my health insurer dropped me in 2010 simply because I came out as trans. Then there was the nurse who lessened me ("Is Ellen really your legal name?"), multiple providers who have misgendered me as if it was nothing, and additionally, as I wrote about two years ago, I encountered a Twin Cities gastroenterology practice that saw fit to label me as "male" even as I wore a delightful sundress and presented a driver's license with an "F" on it.

Heck, even my current internist (whom I love for her grace and compassion) has a record-keeping system that just can't get past the awful-but-nonetheless-true fact that I was born with male genes. Still, I know my experience is absolutely nothing compared to what many trans people have endured where providers just simply refuse to let them in the door. Or, if they make it that far, who ostracize trans people to their faces, feeding into self-hatred and despair.

All of this is made more urgent because of my age. In a year and a half, I'll be on Medicare. In other words, the chief oppressor of transgender humans will be in total control of whether I get healthcare or not. If the 2020 election goes the wrong way, who knows what restrictions might be imposed on transgender Medicare recipients?

Even worse, as I'm learning, since Medicare only covers about 70 percent of healthcare costs, there's the necessity of having supplemental insurance. What if those supplemental insurers decide that simply being trans constitutes a "preexisting condition," thus barring trans folks from purchasing coverage? If the HHS and those who support marginalizing trans people have their way, I think this is a very real risk. Then what? If I think about "then what?" too much, my head will explode.

Three days after my despondency over the HHS announcement set in, the U.S. Supreme Court decided the Bostock case, holding that "sex" under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 included gender and sexual identities. No longer can LGBTQ people be fired for being out at work. The victory did much to lift the cloud of emotional misery that had enveloped me.

But it didn't allay my fears entirely.

I am well aware of how humans become fatigued at some point, after enduring barrage upon barrage of emotion-sapping words, we retreat to self-preservation, forsaking any hint of idealism—which lends to someone, some horrible thing, taking control. Simply put, we surrender. It happened in Nazi Germany. It happened in Rwanda. It happened in Bosnia. And, it's happening in America right now, in real time.

Why would we think Americans are any different from other humans? All of which gets us back to November 3, 2020. The polls have my presidential candidate up by double digits. James Carville, the great political pundit, recently declared that the current White House occupant doesn't have a chance at reelection. My people are feeling good.

While I'd like to be optimistic, I'm anything but. We can't have voters sitting at home thinking this sucker is won. Just 70,000 sat home last time around, which put America squarely where it is now. In short: circle November 3 and vote. Mail it in or go in person. Tell everyone you know that they too, must vote. Then ensure that they do.

The fate of the Republic depends on it. ■

Ellen (Ellie) Krug is the author of Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change *(2013). She speaks and trains on diversity and inclusion topics; visit www.elliekrug.com where you can also sign up for her newsletter, The Ripple. She welcomes your comments at ellenkrugwriter@gmail.com.*

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